



**Lincoln/Lancaster County**  
**Planning Commission Testimony**

**July 11, 2001**

Good evening, and thank you for the opportunity to appear today before the Planning Commission. I'm Amy Cole with the National Trust for Historic Preservation. With over 250,000 members nationwide, the National Trust is the nation's leading non-profit historic preservation organization.

The National Trust has been closely involved with the proposed Lincoln Beltway for five years because of the beltway's potential to negatively impact important historic resources, to convert the predominately rural landscape east of Lincoln into miles of undistinguished and anonymous sprawl, and – as a consequence – to undermine the vitality of downtown Lincoln, as economic development moves to the outskirts. The National Trust has worked in close coordination with two grass-roots citizens groups in Lincoln and Lancaster County: Citizens for Accountable Route Selection and Preservation Association of Lincoln. Over the years, we also have consulted with members of the Lincoln City Council, Lancaster County Commission, Nebraska State Historic Preservation Office, Public Works Department, and the Federal Highway Administration.



Today, as you may know, the National Trust is focussing its efforts on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the beltway project. We believe this primary tool for responsible decision-making is fundamentally flawed and must be corrected before federal environmental review can proceed.

I am before you today to testify in opposition to Comprehensive Plan Amendment #94-63 for the East Far Beltway. The National Trust does not support construction of the beltway on EF-1 and has vigorously opposed this alignment since it was selected in 1998 as the Super Common's "preferred alternative." We are pleased that the Planning Department Staff has recommended denial of Amendment #94-63.

We agree with the Planning Department staff's assessment that the East Far Route has "more impacts on historic structures than the other two routes." Moreover, beyond the impact on historic structures, the East Far route will have harmful effects on farmland intimately associated with at least seven historically significant farms and will dramatically - and permanently - change the rural, agricultural landscape of the area.

We also share the Planning Department's concern that the Far East Route places the beltway "far beyond the edge of the future urban area of Lincoln." It is widely accepted that construction of highways induces sprawling development. Sprawl can be characterized as spread-out, low density, land-consumptive development located on the fringe of cities that is dominated by and dependant on the automobile. Sprawl subjects

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each of us to traffic woes, erodes our quality of life, raises taxes – as we pay for the infrastructure needed by sprawl developments – and permanently sacrifices open space, farmland, and historic places. This issue will be exacerbated by the construction of a beltway route far from the city center. Too often communities allow development to leapfrog from the existing urban edge to the edge of a new highway. The resulting development is inevitably costly and destructive.

We recognize and commend the City of Lincoln and Lancaster County for their past efforts to promote managed growth and for their support of active, vibrant commercial and residential areas of downtown Lincoln. However, we strongly urge local decision-makers to consider the fact that construction of the proposed beltway may well undermine the City and County's past efforts, as farmland around the beltway corridor becomes ripe for development. The US Department of Agriculture conservatively estimates that across the United States 2,000,000 acres of farmland are lost to development every year – that's 228 acres per hour. Nationwide, more than 17,000 square miles of land that was rural in 1990 reached suburban or urban density by 2000.

The connection between transportation and induced growth is inescapable. A recent study of highway construction and growth in Maryland showed that "80% of properties within the highway corridors of central Maryland were built when a highway already existed within five miles." In addition to the timing of development, the report found that

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“highway corridors are more developed than areas beyond the immediate vicinity of the highways.” If the beltway is built, these same development issues will arise east of Lincoln.

We regret that the City of Lincoln and Lancaster County are intent upon building a beltway. Both the City Planning Department and the Federal Highway Administration acknowledge that the beltway will not alleviate Lincoln’s traffic congestion. However, the beltway surely will convert the rolling hills of the Stevens Creek area to residential, commercial, and industrial development. Once rural land is converted, there’s no going back.

Because of the issue of the beltway route selection and the threat posed to the historic agricultural landscape by an eastern beltway, the National Trust recently named the Steven’s Creek Settlements to its list of America’s 11 Most Endangered Historic Places. We hope that by including the Steven’s Creek Settlements on this year’s list, we can illustrate that it is not too late for this community to choose to preserve the historic, rural character of this area. We urge Lincoln and Lancaster County to proceed with great care.

Thank you for considering the views of the National Trust.